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AUTHOR McGee, Brian R.
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ABSTRACT

Both complaints and praise regarding debate as it is now practiced and taught are predicated on the communication which goes on in debate rounds. These communicative relations are fourfold, including the relations of debaters with debaters, debaters with judges, debaters with evidence, and judges with evidence. To study the relations between persons in debate necessitates some perspective on interpersonal relations, on the communication which occurs between participants in debate. Utilizing Martin Buber's dialogical thematics in communicology, it can be argued that the most constructive and enjoyable debate competitions embody the relationship implied by Buber's phrase "I-You," which is for Buber one basic word, for, "when one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too." The solution to debate's "decline" or "crisis" is likely to come from a renewed commitment by those involved in debate to relate to debaters, judges, and texts in their own uniqueness and particularities. Debate must be perceived positively by all participants, debaters and audience alike, or the controversy over the so-called decline of debate will continue. (Eight notes are included; 63 references are attached.) (RS)

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Debate as Dialogic Communication: Implications of Martin Buber's Thematics in Communicology for Academic Debate

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Brian R. McGee
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre
Northeast Louisiana University
Monroe, Louisiana 71209-0324

CS507348

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Debate as Dialogic Communication: Implications of
Martin Buber's Thematics in Communicology for Academic Debate

"It [Buber's I and Thou] is a great book; perhaps one of the rare and sustained works of universal meaning written in our time" (Cohen, 1957, p. 46). One can grant such a claim, of course, while failing to acknowledge the relevance of such an argument for everyday existence. Great works of philosophy and literature gather dust on library shelves, while students read the contemporary equivalent of pulp fiction. Or, if those students participate in academic debate, they ignore those dusty old library books in favor of the new book shelf, as they ceaselessly search for the new, improved expert testimony that will allow them to win more debates.

If "rare and sustained works of universal meaning" are to be made meaningful for a larger audience, perhaps it is necessary for scholars to apply the principles of these works to those activities in which a larger audience takes interest. It is my intent to attempt such an application in this paper. I am confident at least that a few debaters and coaches will glance at this paper in hopes of finding evidence.

The Decline of Debate?

The perspective one is given on the relative health and on the pedagogical value of intercollegiate debate is highly dependent upon the ideas to which one is exposed. Some journal articles and convention papers defend different contemporary

debate practices (many of which are now considered "praxis"), while other papers bemoan these practices.[1] Some coaches and debaters praise the large quantities of arguments introduced in some debate rounds, while others wish for the return of the argumentation practices and delivery techniques of debate's "Golden Age," which allegedly existed in the interval between the end of World War II and 1970. While criticism of debate is sometimes leveled by lay persons (See McGough, 1988), it more often comes from debaters, coaches, and judges. As Pearce (1974) reported several years ago, "one would have expected the most favorable attitudes toward forensics to be found among members of the AFA [American Forensic Association]. The fact that they were not implies some degree of disaffection or disillusionment among those most closely involved with forensics" (p. 139).

The claim that something is wrong with debate is not uncommon. The coaches of two nationally prominent policy debate programs worried recently that intercollegiate policy debate, at least, might be "dying" (Rowland & Deatherage, 1988, p. 246). Participation in NDT (National Debate Tournament) policy debate has declined dramatically over the past decade, as Morello and Soenksen (1989) point out, and, in my own experience, few regional NDT tournaments have attracted even twenty varsity debate team entries in recent years. Rowland and Deatherage (1988) note with concern that "a variety of entry barriers . . . have limited the capacity of this form of debate to attract and sustain student and programmatic participation" (p. 246). One study, which was generally supportive of debate, nevertheless

spells out some of these entry barriers: "The stories about the problems caused by the [rapid] rate of delivery are commonplace . . . . Among other disvantages [of debate participation] . . . are the use of unrealistic and spurious arguments, too much jargon and the over-reliance on authority and evidence" (Matlon & Keele, 1984, p. 198). The combination of high-speed delivery and heavy research and travel requirements may well explain the decline of participation in NDT debate. "The time demands on both debaters and coaches are severe. Research time, travel time, practice round time, and tournament time require too much of students. . . . There are increasingly fewer students and educators willing to pay this kind of personal price" (Brooks, 1984, p. 14).

In response to the decline in participation, the NDT Committee and another intercollegiate policy debate organization, the American Debate Assocation (ADA), have enacted rules which seek to curb the abuses which allegedly exist in college debate (although ADA rules are much more restrictive). The effectiveness of these rules and their educational justification have aroused much controversy (Herbeck & Katsulas, 1988; Morello & Soenksen, 1989), but the long-term impact of these rules on debate participation has not yet been demonstrated.

It is possible for NDT debaters and coaches to place much of the blame for falling participation on the growth of Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) non-policy debate, but it might now be claimed that this CEDA growth period has ended. CEDA membership has arguably stabilized over the last several

years, and many worry that membership will decline as well-financed colleges and universities continue to dominate the sweepstakes standings. Two recently proposed amendments to the CEDA Constitution would alter the year-long sweepstakes calculation process as a way to decrease the financial burdens imposed on debate participants and thus to allow "smaller" programs the opportunity to compete for national sweepstakes recognition.[2]

Further, debaters, judges and coaches have commented recently, to the delight of some and the chagrin of others, that the distinction between debate practice in CEDA and NDT has blurred, at least in recent years. For example, NDT and CEDA debaters at the highly regarded University of Kansas' 1989 "Heart of America" tournament participated in an open discussion on their respective debate organizations. While unanimity did not exist on this point, the prevailing consensus among debaters attending this forum appeared to be that the "best" CEDA and NDT debates are quite similar. Some CEDA debaters mentioned that they often engaged in policy argumentation, while one NDT debater discussed his (marginal) success with "value" arguments in policy debate. If entry barriers in NDT debate have become too formidable, and if this discussion provides a useful indicator, one wonders if CEDA will also experience a membership decline, perhaps in the near future.

If so much concern exists regarding college debate, what is the condition of high school debate? While less discussion about levels of participation appears to exist, many coaches and lay

persons complain that high school debaters, like their collegiate peers, have sacrificed the utilization of appropriate communication practices and reasonable arguments in favor of high-speed strategic maneuvers and unlikely scenarios that commonly end in nuclear war, ecological devastation, or the total loss of individual rights. As one detractor of high school debate noted in a widely-read magazine, "the absurdity of the argument won't be held against you. In the surreal world of abstraction that is debate, one argument is as good as another--provided that it is supported by a `quote card' from an expert" (McGough, 1988, p. 19).

Debate is by no means "dead." Many colleges and universities continue to set aside thousands of dollars in travel funding for debate. A large number of students participate in competitive high school and college debate every year. Ex-debaters seem to generally view their debate participation positively, and a correlation appears to exist between debating and future professional success (Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Huseman & Goodman, 1976; Matlon & Keele, 1984; Pollock, 1972). Why, then, do so many detractors of debate exist?

An answer to this problematic will not be found in debate journals or in conference papers alone, where those interested in debate trade higher-order abstractions about the "future of debate" and the appropriate role of critic-judges in debate adjudication. Rather, I believe a starting point for resolution of this conflict about debate is found in the critique of a debater from the Golden Age: "When <u>we</u> began a speech, we said,

`Good morning' as if we were talking to real people" (McGough, 1988, p. 18; emphasis added). Perhaps something has changed in the relation between judges and debaters over the last few decades. Even if the debate which "used to be" has been romanticized, it is apparent from reading many judging philosophies and listening to hallway diatribes at tournaments that some of those who watch and listen to debates are not satisfied with the ways in which debaters relate to their audiences. Part of this dissatisfaction may be traced to predispositions and beliefs about debate pedagogy which are held by certain coaches and judges, but I believe that the problem may be even more fundamental. Many judges, perhaps too many, feel that their thoughts and opinions, their attitudes and values, are trivialized in judging. The novice debater and the veteran judge may have this in common: On some occasions they correctly or incorrectly feel themselves reduced to pen-wielding, card-counting automatons, whose subjectivity must be set aside in order to play the "game" to the satisfaction of other participants.[3]

Both complaints and praise regarding debate as it is now practiced and taught are predicated on the communication which goes on in debate rounds. These communicative relations are fourfold, including the relations of debaters with debaters, debaters with judges, debaters with evidence, and judges with evidence. How are these relationships expressed? What processes/happenings make the debate event enjoyable not only for the winning debate team, but also for the losing team and the

judge? A better understanding of what makes debate rewarding, or even "fun" for judges and debaters alike, might make constructive changes in current debate practice possible. Perhaps we must cast aside decades of bickering about debate and "begin at the beginning" in looking to the conduct of debaters and judges in "real" debate rounds to acquire this understanding. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains, "to return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language" (p. ix; emphasis in original).

To study the relations between persons in debate necessitates some perspective on interpersonal relations, on the communication which occurs between participants in debate. Utilizing Martin Buber's dialogical thematics in communicology[4], I will argue that the most constructive and enjoyable debate competitions embody the relationship implied by Buber's phrase "I-You," which is for Buber one basic word.[5] The dissatisfaction often expressed about contemporary debate practice will not ultimately be resolved via constitutional change, rule enactment, or an increased proclivity to judge intervention, although these strategies may not be totally ineffective in altering contemporary debate practices. The solution to debate's "decline" or "crisis" is more likely to come from a renewed commitment by those involved in debate to relate to debaters, judges, and texts in their own uniquenesses and particularities.

Debate must be perceived positively by all participants, debaters and audience alike, or the controversy over the so-called decline of debate will continue.

Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

Maurice Friedman, perhaps Buber's best-known biographer and interpreter, responded many years ago to the suggestion that Buber was in "vogue" at that time by claiming that "if so, it is a `vogue' that seems to be becoming firmly established" (1960, p. vi). Over the next thirty years, the contribution of Buber's work to the study of religion, philosophy, and communication has been considerable. A staggering number of those trees which he talked about encountering in "I-You" relations have died to provide paper for those who explicate his work!

Buber is difficult to interpret, and even more difficult to gloss. His ideas resist categorization and definitive explanation. As Friedman (1960) notes,

> Most of us approach a book expecting little other than an extension and application of concepts which we already possess or at the most a stretching of these concepts through the introduction of new perspectives. We find it painful, therefore, to come up against a thinker like Buber who questions the fundamental channels of our thinking and forces us to think--if we are to follow him at all--in radically other ways (pp. 3-4).

Buber has been called many things: A wise, old man, a prophet, a theologian, and a philosopher. Many of his interpreters have argued about which label is most appropriate. Perhaps Buber's life and work best correspond to Merleau-Ponty's (1988) description of the philosopher: "The philosopher is marked by the distinguishing trait that he [or she] possesses

inseparably the taste for evidence and the feeling for ambiguity" (p. 4; emphasis in original). Buber sought to explicate the ambiguous connection of humans to both the world of objects, which are experienced, used, and controlled, and the world of subjects, where one encounters nature, persons, and spiritual beings (Buber, 1970, pp. 56-57). This perception of the world as offering a potentiality for both experience and relation is unique and different for every individual. When "will" and "grace" are sufficient, one surpasses the world of experience and enters, however briefly, the world of relation. These intervals of relation, of dialogue, affect future perceptions of the other. Humans in their individual particularities encounter the world in these two different but intimately intertwined ways. As Buber begins I and Thou, "the world is twofold for man [people] in accordance with his [their] twofold attitude" (1970, p. 53). Prior to exploring his philosophy of dialogue, I will briefly explain (1) his stance regarding objectivism, and (2) the locus of his work.

First, Buber rejects belief in a certain, objective reality and truth which may be discovered by humans. For Buber, "there is and can be no objective criterion which will establish universal standards of judgment regarding the fundamental issues of human existence, because there are no philosophical arguments . . . which can coerce men [people] into uniformity on these matters" (Diamond, 1960, p. 33). He rejects a human-centered objectivity, recognizing God, the eternal You, as the only source of certain meaning. Objectivity may exist, but humans cannot

discern with certainty. Arnett (1986) argues that Buber "worked as an interpretive researcher. . . . He brought his own uniqueness to bear on the subject matter, fully expecting another person to see different phenomena than he would conceptualize" (p. 9).

Second, Buber was less interested in production of the higher-order abstractions commonly associated with philosophy than he was in the world in which he lived. His "philosophy" of dialogue was and is directed more "toward what Buber terms real questions . . . than toward philosophical problems" (Diamond, 1960, p. 15). This concentration on the immediate concerns of life and living makes him all the more compelling as a writer and thinker. Perhaps Kaufman, in his translater's prologue to I and Thou, is correct in saying that "modern man [sic] is a voracious reader who has never learned to read well," but Buber compells the reader to read carefully, to go line-by-line, to engage in a dialogue with him across a space-time which fails to prevent dialogue.

It is impossible for me to summarize the components of Buber's philosophy. I might seek to explain him, and I might presume to explicate his philosophy of dialogue, but something is lost (and gained) when my own voice is used. I can only report the ways in which he speaks to me. I will write my impressions of dialogue with him.

The Foundations of Dialogue

The I-You of encounter is difficult to explain apart from the complementary I-It of experience and control. One cannot break apart I from You or I from It. For, "when one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too. When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too. . . . There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It" (Buber, 1970, p. 54). The I of the word-pair I-You is different from the I of the word-pair I-It. The I of encounter is open to participation, while the I of experience is an interior I, separated from the world. This indivisibility of I from You or It underlies the apparent dualism of Buber, although Buber never means to suggest that one relates to an other either as You or It at any interval in space-time. Rather, his writing implies that one may walk the "narrow ridge" between human subject and impersonal object in the effort to "locate man [sic] in his wholeness, prior to the moment when each man puts on his private mask and departs his separate way" (Cohen, 1957, p. 50).

In the beginning, before an I ever exists, the word-phrase I-You exists. Buber (1970) suggests that young children generally, as well as the members of primitive cultures, think only in terms of the I-You. "Like primitives, the child lives between sleep and sleep . . . in the lightning and counter-lightning of encounter" (Buber, 1970, p. 77). For Merleau-Ponty (1964), this period in a child's life is termed the "primordial me," where the child has "the attitude of a me which is unaware of itself and lives as easily in others as it does in itself" (p.

119). Later in the child's development, "the I arises when the child understands that . . . there must be a consciousness of the reciprocity of points of view in order that the word I may be used" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 150). Buber explains that the discovery that "I" and "You" are reversible requires the presence of a You:

> What confronts us comes and vanishes, relational events take shape and scatter, and through these changes crystallizes, more and more each time, . . . the I-consciousness. . . . It comes closer and closer to the bursting point until one day the bonds are broken and the I confronts its detached self for a moment like a You--and then it takes possession of itself and henceforth enters into relations in full consciousness (Buber, 1970, p. 80).

Once the I is discovered, the word-pair I-It comes together. Before I and You are separated, one lives in a world of Otherness. The singular I, however, no longer perceives her or his world only as a presence. The world is transformed into a source of experience and a possibility for control. Beyond the limits of one's body the world is perceived as a separateness which is detached from oneself. The world supplys a vast array of potential experiences, but it no longer is only an other, a You.

I-You and I-It

In I and Thou, the distinction between the word-pairs I-It and I-You is indicated via a series of oppositions. The experience of the world of objects, the It-world, is contrasted with participation in the world of subjects, the You-world. Experience is interior, occurring within a human, while participation is possible only between the human and his or her

You. "The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation" (Buber, 1970, p. 80).

The relation, the encounter of the I-You, is unique, as the participant in dialogue recognizes the other in his or her uniqueness and particularity. "Every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its You is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness. It fills the firmament--not as if there were nothing else, but everything else lives in its light" (Buber, 1970, p. 126; emphasis in original). In the world of experience, of the I-It, beings are surrounded and limited by other persons and objects. The emphasis on uniqueness, even on personhood, is lost as humans are seen primarily as performers of tasks: debater, spouse, politician, cab driver, supermarket cashier. Thus, one's perception of the world is dependent on whether one's approach to the world is experience-centered or relation-centered. "There is no world of appearance, there is only the world--which, to be sure, appears twofold to us in accordance with our twofold attitude" (Buber, 1970, p. 125). In this respect humans exercise choice. One may accept the possibility of encounter and participate in dialogue whenever the presence of an other is made manifest, or one may retreat from the possibility of encounter and continue to experience the other as an It. "What has to be given up is not the I but that false drive for self-affirmation which impels man [humans] to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of

things" (Buber, 1970, p. 126). The risk required by encounter is obvious, for one lays oneself open to change, or to embarrassment and rejection. But the dangers of continued failure to encounter are even greater. "And in all seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human" (Buber, 1970, p. 85). Even hatred of an other is preferable to indifference, suggests Buber, because hatred more nearly approaches relation than does uncaring.

In many fields of study, including communication, the term "dialogue" is associated with Buber's I-You of relationship, or encounter.[6] The I-It of experience is labeled "monologue" (Johannesen, 1971) or "dialectic" (Friedman, 1989). Maurice Friedman (1989) explains the dialogue/dialectic distinction:

> As the prefix "dia" suggests, both dialogue and dialectic imply the alternation between two different point[s] of view. In the case of dialogue, this also means real meeting with the unique otherness of another, whereas in the case of dialectic the alternation may take place within the head of a single thinker, and the points of view may remain disembodied and hypothetical (p. 8).

Much human communication theory and research has been influenced by this twofold approach to the set of communicators towards one another. When one speaks of dialogic communication, therefore, one refers to an attitude or orientation towards communication characterized by an openness to an other in her or his existential uniqueness and by a willingness to risk opening oneself to that other. In dialogic communication, the other is not only the performer of some role or function, but the other is also (and primarily) an end in herself or himself, to borrow Kant's explanation.

Buber seeks to clarify the implications of the It-You distinction throughout I and Thou and in much of his later writing. Two of these clarifications are of particular importance. First, the I-You relation is not limited to the perception of human beings, and the I-It experience is not limited to the perception of non-humans. While relations between humans are the primary focus of Buber's work, he also understood that the I-You relation is possible with animals, plants, and even with "lifeless" objects such as a fragment of mica. Included in this is idea is the notion of encounter with an other who is not physically present, but is nevertheless a presence. The reader, for example, may engage Aristotle or Buber in dialogue, releasing them from the imprisonment of the library.

Second, Buber does not see the I-It experience as evil, although such experience may become evil if it negates the possibility of the I-You of dialogue, of relation. Most of our waking moments are filled with experiences of the world, and to attempt dialogic communication with everyone (let alone everything) that we meet would be futile. The exhaustion created by the constant strain of attempted encounters with cab drivers and supermarket cashiers would be considerable. Yet sometimes, at unlikely moments, such relations will come into being, perhaps for just a fleeting space of time, when the other is encountered "as a living conscious human being" (von Eckartsberg, 1965, p. 206). Life does not unfold according to some "either/or" digital logic (Lanigan, 1988), in which one either experiences or participates. Rather, one lives life in accordance with a

"both/and" analogue logic, in which I-You and I-It are involved in complex interrelationships unique to every individual. I experience You as both I and It in ways which are determined by my set toward the world as I perceive it at particular moments in space and time.

Transcendence of the I-It in Academic Debate

One of the concerns expressed by Buber is that contemporary society is increasingly enamored with the mastery of It. Different cultures and traditions combine their talents for manipulation and control of things. Technologies are devised which provide new delights for citizens, but these delights are those of convenient experience, rather than those of encounter. Ultimately, "the improvement of the capacity for experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's [human] power to relate" (Buber, 1970, p. 89). As societies turn away from encountering, as the time invested in It makes dialogue with You more difficult, something is lost.

It is easily argued that academic debate provides an exemplar of the trend toward I-It experience. Debaters spend large quantities of time in libraries rather than with people. Rarely is there even a possibility for encountering the author of a text as she or he speaks; too often evidence-seekers skim books, magazines, and journals for the appropriate words without even a concern for context, let alone an interest in letting authors speak to them. The ceaseless search for "causes" and "effects" undermines any hope for dialogue as the student

retreats into the It-world of causality (Buber, 1970, p. 100). Perhaps the debater can be forgiven for a disinterest in dialogue, when one considers the pressures of debate research and full-time study. But neither are debaters to be congratulated for the refusal to open themselves to encounter.

One also generally "experiences" the debates themselves, rather than "participating" in them. During debate rounds, debaters often callously speak of human lives in terms of "costs" and "benefits," and jest about the number of nuclear war scenarios that can be argued by the conclusion of the debate. The arguments themselves are often less troublesome to judges than is the casualness with which debaters make them. When even the horrible effects of nuclear war are not taken seriously by debaters, debaters are perceived to have abandoned their duty to act as responsible advocates. If debate teams of unequal expertise compete, the team with the greater ability often "runs away" with the debate round, humiliating their opponents to "ensure" an already certain victory. Brockriede's (1972) sexual metaphor is telling:

> Another place to find the rapist's attitudes and intentions in the adversary situation is the intercollegiate debate. The language is symptomatic: "We killed them last round." "We destroyed them." . . . In all such situations the rapist's attitudes toward coarguers is contempt, his intent is to victimize, and the act itself, given one other ingredient, is rape (p. 3).

Judges are sometimes bothered by how little debaters seek to relate to them or to their opponents (except in often-irrelevant or needlessly hostile cross-examination periods). In this hostile environment, the disdained "rock" or "stone" judge's

admonition that debaters make eye contact with her or him may be triggered less by a desire to encourage development of public speaking skills than by a desire for inclusion in the debate. The judge in this instance hopes that notes inscribed on notepads might be explained by debaters forced to recognize in some minimal way the presence of another human being.

The post-debate atmosphere is little better. The victorious debaters, if the winner of the debate is revealed by the judge, express satisfaction and listen absently as the judge explains the rationale for the decision. The losing debaters often express their dissatisfaction with the decision, asking harsh questions with scarcely veiled contempt. In the hallways the disdain felt toward some judges is conveyed quite openly, and debaters mutter that the judge will be "struck" in the future if the opportunity exists. Rarely is a judge's effort or consideration acknowledged by debaters, especially if they are the "losers." Little wonder that some highly qualified judges with much "experience of" judging avoid the experience when possible by hiring others to fulfill this unpleasant duty!

The attitudes of debaters toward other debaters are in many cases also representative of the world of It, of control and use. Often debaters of other schools are described as "slimy" or even "liars." Others are labeled as incompetent, stupid, or worse, sometimes with little justification.

Finally, judges are sometimes guilty of adopting this It-worldview. Some judges fail to act as responsible educators and fair adjudicators. While most of the persons involved in debate

believe that judges have considerable latitude to give competitors a set of guidelines or restrictions, some judges fail to give arguments the careful attention which is required for fair and competent judgment. Moreover, some impose their own predispositions on debaters without prior warning. This failure to attend to the efforts of debaters is both inconsiderate and inappropriate. Such judge behavior devalues the enormous efforts required of debaters to prepare for tournament competition. These examples illustrate my view of the I-It experience of debating and judging.

One may argue that I exaggerate, and perhaps I do. I do not have access to other's evaluations of debate and debating, although I believe that much of what I say here will correspond, or "ring true," with the perceptions of others regarding the current practice of academic debate. I can only describe debate as I perceive it, and if one rejects my description, then my interpretation will have little value.[7]

The grim picture created above, however, is not meant to signal hopelessness. Just as in all other areas of human endeavor, the possibility of relation remains in debate. I believe that the "best" debates I ever heard included such encounters, where debaters took the arguments they advocated seriously and were even willing to risk an unfavorable decision to make their arguments, where debaters did more than "pull taglines" and explained the personal relevance of arguments for the persons in the debate round, where debaters and judges were co-participants in argument rather than hostile adversaries,

where judges and debaters alike were satisfied by their efforts, by their relation, regardless of outcome. Whatever the unsatisfying everydayness of the It-world of debate, dialogue remains a possibility. "But whatever has thus been changed into It and frozen into a thing among things is still endowed with the meaning and the destiny to change back ever again" (Buber, 1970, p. 90). The personal relevance of these debates for the participants is perhaps their most important component. The typical rebuttalist in debate pulls taglines, but the outstanding rebuttalist has the ability to make the abstraction of arguments "real" for the judge. Humans are returned to the debate. Debaters and judge are encountered as "You(s)," as persons with individualized perceptions and feelings, as persons with whom dialogue is possible, rather than as pen-utilizing machines.

In these best debates "will" and "grace" combine to allow I-You encounters. None of the characteristics of debate as dialogic communication mentioned in this paper are anything other than objectified manifestations of will (openness to dialogue) and grace (some "unpredictable something" [Wood, 1986, p. 321]) as necessary conditions for encounter. When will and grace meet, dialogue exists; when both are not present, dialogue is stillborn. These encounters in debates are often fleeting. It is easy to be distracted by the It-world of experience, as one debater's arguments are compared to another's arguments. In other instances the dialogue that can take place in a single glance is disrupted as the judge suspects the debater of inauthenticity, for sometimes even "animals, like children, see

through feigned tenderness" (Buber, 1970, p. 172). Nor is the judge-debater relation ever wholly dialogic. The role of the judge as both educator and adjudicator prevents her or him from entering completely into relation. The judge's duties require that a dichotomous decision be rendered about the quality of the arguments made during the debate, and that a value be assigned to the arguments of the debaters. The judge must make a judgment, which requires the objectification of debate and debaters.

Yet debaters and judges recognize the existence of relation when it occurs. Debaters expose their "souls," their feelings, their weaknesses as they share their universe with others. Debating at these times retains the to-and-fro motion of play (Gadamer, 1989), but the play becomes ever more serious as debaters commit themselves to their arguments. Risk is involved as debaters "put themselves into" their arguments. Debate is no longer another learning "experience," but instead offers a potential for engagement, a risking of rejection, an opportunity for encounter. The debater who is open to dialogue, like the "ideal" philosopher, "asks for free assent, advancing arguments openly and asking for open criticism. He [or she] risks his [or her] own self and asks for that same risk from coarguers. He [or she] seeks a bilateral relationship with human beings" (Brockriede, 1972, p. 7).

This risk of rejection is not the receipt of a "loss" from a judge. That is a possibility recognized by the debater, that may even by made more likely by the encounter. Dialogue, after all, may not always be consistent with the instrumental rationality of

gamespersonship and strategic choice. The rejection comes if the judge fails to recognize and participate in the relation offered by the debater. If the judge does not repond reciprocally to the debater's openness to dialogue, then rejection is complete.

When the judge responds to the gesture of the debater in a like fashion, however, a mutual dialogue takes place. The judge is put at risk as well, as she or he begins to <u>care</u> about arguments and the humans making those arguments, rather than remaining behind the protective shell of the judge's role as objective adjudicator. This reciprocal sharing in dialogic communication is what some have called the <u>We</u>-relation (von Eckartsberg, 1965), in which all participants engage in encounter, in which the I-You relation is reciprocal. At these rare times, experience of debating becomes participation in debating. Contempt and apathy regarding one's opponents and concerning arguments made during the debate recede as one participates in dialogue. Arguments are confronted and taken seriously, rather than belittled. This interpretation is consistent with Johannesen's (1971) claim that "a basic element in dialogue is `seeing the other' or `experiencing the other side.' One also does not forego his [or her] own convictions or views, but he [or she] strives to understand those of the other and avoids imposing his [or her] own on the other" (p. 375). Such debates are often praised by debaters and judge alike, but such praise seems somehow inadequate. Praise comes afterward, once dialogue has ended and the debate has become an It which is compared to other debates. What was "great" about the debate,

however, was the existential risk taken by debaters and judge alike, for however brief a duration. Such a moment sets debate as dialogic communication apart from the mechanized experience of so many other debates.

The Renewal of Debate?

What implications does my interpretation of debate as dialogic communication have for academic debate? It may be more appropriate to begin by suggesting what implications should not be drawn from my argument. First, although my description of debate as an I-It, dialectical experience is negative, I do not mean to vilify the It-world. Determination of causes and effects may sometimes be needful. Certainly a better understanding of the It-world may lead to more comfort and convenience. The It-world, however, should be counter-balanced by an openness to the possibility of encounter, of dialogue, or it may be strongly argued that we have lost our souls in a bargain with the Devil. The person unwilling to encounter is, as Buber suggests, somehow incomplete.

Second, I do not advocate making debates self-consciously "touchy-feely" or somehow removing competition from debate. Development of effective advocacy and argumentation skills should rightfully remain a principal focus of intercollegiate debate, and I suspect that many students develop and maintain interest largely because of the opportunities to excel provided by the current competitive environment. Indeed, I question whether changes in form will succeed in satisfying those who

complain about the crisis of debate. The creation of the CEDA organization has certainly not reduced complaints about many debate practices (at least in my own experience), and students seem to be quite adroit in subverting those rules or normative guidelines with which they do not wish to comply. As Rowland and Deatherage (1988) conclude, debaters are often able to pressure judges to accept unliked practices, since few judges wish to be labeled "neanderthal."

Instead, I believe that a resolution of this problematic, if one exists, may be found in the relation of coaches to debaters. If coaches are "role-models" for debaters, as Brooks (1984) suggests, then coaches must participate in the development of their debaters as arguers, rather than merely experiencing this evolution. By this I mean that coaches tend to set the standards with which debaters are evaluated by their peers. What message is implicit, for example, when a debater is sent to a tournaments despite her or his own tendency to verbally abuse and deride judges and debaters? If "winning" is valued by a coach more than the humane treatment of one's colleagues, then that coach's students are hardly encouraged to encounter their opponents. "Killing them" or "crushing them" will surely be preferred, as long as the judge will not lower their "speaker points" for doing so! I do not mean to suggest that debates become encounter-group sessions, but standards of humaneness, set by coaches for their own students, may discourage students from overtly denying the personhood of their peers. If nothing else, debaters might be reproached for communicating a disrespect for one another as

human beings. While such standards may not be sufficient conditions for dialogue, they certain mark a first step away from the It-world of use and control.

Second, coaches might urge their students to become "committed" to their arguments. This might mean selecting arguments which debaters personally feel to be "correct" in their own judgment, but a belief in the certain truth of one's claim is not required for commitment. By commitment I mean that debaters should take an interest in what the authors of their evidence are trying to say to them. Books and journal articles are not always written because scholars wish to earn points toward tenure and promotion decisions (though these motivations may not be irrelevant). In many cases, authors believe that they have something of importance to say about some issue. If debaters are consistently encouraged to question their own evidence, to listen to and participate in the eloquence of that evidence, debate might change for the better. Debaters would certainly interpret and explain their arguments more effectively, but a more profound justification exists for commitment to arguments. When one turns openly to the expression of another, no matter how far one is removed in space-time from that other, encounter is possible. Such an encounter makes of debate a game which is nevertheless of great seriousness and importance for debaters, judge, and authors of evidence. Debaters should listen to what their authors say!

Finally, and most importantly, coaches should encourage students to accept responsibility for their own actions, rather than blaming losses on partners, judges, or other debaters.

When one loses a debate, rarely is some other person totally at fault for that loss. Rather, a combination of errors made by both partners is to blame. In the intense environment of a two-hour debate, the adage that the winners were those debaters who "screwed up least" is an appropriate summary of many debates. Coaches may encourage students to accept this personal responsibility by providing a role model in this regard. How many coaches admit to having "lost" debates during their own debate careers? More importantly, how many coaches are perceived as taking their judging responsibilities seriously? How many coaches are perceived by their own students as insensitive to their problems or concerns? The judge who is open to encounter with those she or he has judged and the coach who is willing to engage her or his own students in dialogue provide an ongoing example of caring and personal commitment to their own students. Coaches who take responsibility for their own choices and actions provide an example of such responsible behavior for their own debaters.

No person can be coerced to encounter another, and such coercion attempts would be antithetical to dialogic communication as I understand it. Coaches may sincerely seek to implement my suggestions, yet fail to influence their debaters. However, I believe that students are influenced to some degree by the communication practices of those who have a daily influence on those students. If coaches provide adequate role models as dialogic communicators, complaints about the "decline of debate" may subside, as debaters become less hostile towards one another

and towards their judges. Ideally, if participation in debate becomes more common than experience of debate, talk of debate's crisis may die away.[8]

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ENDNOTES

1 Examples of such disputed practices include preference of "plan focus" or "resolution focus" (Bile, 1987; Herbeck & Katsulas, 1985; Madsen & Chandler, 1988; Rhodes & Pfau, 1985), the appropriateness of "counter-warrants" in policy and/or non-policy debate (Ganer, 1981; Keeshan & Ulrich, 1980; Paulsen & Rhodes, 1979; McGee, 1988; Simon, 1984), the optimal means of "criteria" assessment (Cole, Boggs, & Twohy, 1986; Leeman, 1990), and the limits of affirmative and negative "fiat" in policy and non-policy debate (Dempsey, 1984; Edwards, 1987; Katsulas, Herbeck, & Panetta, 1987; Solt, 1989).

2 These two remarkably similar amendments would effect Article VII, Section 2, Subpoint B of the CEDA Constitution. Both were apparently proposed simultaneously by the debate coaching staffs at Cornell University and at the University of South Carolina. See enclosures in the Executive Secretary's Report, Cross Examination Debate Association, October 2, 1990.

3 I do not, as have some, mean to critique the games-theoretic approach to communication studies and to academic debate (See Snider, 1984). Games played within certain boundaries (i.e., "rules") may well be both entertaining and educational, and they certainly may be taken seriously. As Gadamer (1989) notes, "play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself [or herself] in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play" (p. 102).

4 The coinage "communicology" is unfamiliar to many scholars in speech communication. Lanigan (1988) explains that "communicology is the theory and practice of human communication. As such it partakes in the methodologies of both philosophy and science as research operations" (p. 118). In contrast to the social, behavioral, and physical sciences, which are respectively grounded in abstractions of society, action, and the physical world, communicology as a human science is grounded "in consciousness and its reflexive condition, experience" (Lanigan, 1985, p. 1). For further discussion, see DeVito (1978) and Lanigan (1988). In addition to the work of Martin Buber, I rely on Merleau-Ponty's theory of existential communication. The human is a body-subject who both expresses and perceives. This expression-perception process is both reflexive and reversible. See Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964) and Lanigan (1988).

5 The antiquated word "Thou" is commonly associated with Martin Buber. While Kaufman's translation retains the original English title from the earlier Ronald Gregor Smith translation, *I and Thou*, I will follow Kaufman's lead in rendering the German *Du* as "You" rather than "Thou."

6 While the term "encounter" is sometimes used to describe all interpersonal communication, whether I-It or I-You in orientation, I use "encounter" only to signal participation in Buber's I-You attitude. For my purposes, encounter is interchangeable with relation and dialogue.

7 Those who have known me as debater and debate coach might correctly point out that I have been guilty of many of the practices which I critique. I do not deny my guilt. Writing this paper has forced me to re-think and revise many of my own beliefs regarding the practice of academic debate.

8 A revised version of this paper will be submitted for publication in early 1991.